

ARF - AMAN

COVID-19 RESPONSE ACTIVITY REPORT

JAN - MAY 2020



www.arf-int.org



@AsianResourceFoundation



arf@arf-int.org



@AsianMuslimActionNetwork

COVID-19 RESPONSE ACTIVITY REPORT

The Covid-19 crisis is far from over, as 4,258,666 confirmed cases are reported at the time this report is been written, and 294,190 people already died. South and South East Asia are, until now, the least affected by the spread of the virus. Yet, the region is one of the most economically affected area by the crisis and a second wave of transmission remains a slow-burning threat.

More than a billion people are facing lock downs and, consequently, millions lost their jobs and earnings. Urban and rural poor as daily wage earners, maid servants and floating people who live on the footpath and temporary shelter and marginalized farming families have been impacted severely, as national and regional lock downs are causing a difficult access to supply of food and basic necessities. Moreover, the shutdowns of shops and businesses have deprived thousands of people of an income and have exposed them and their families to important food security risks.

In the context of Ramadan, the restrictions due to the progression of the COVID-19 deeply reconfigured the practice of faith and the sharing spirit of the holy month in countries with a majority of Muslims.

ARF and AMAN have mobilized modest funds from Muslimehelfen from Germany, LIFE from France and Helping Hands from the US, which enabled the distribution of food packs in Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, Azad Kashmir and India.

The document aims to give brief contextual information on the countries where humanitarian aid was deployed and to detail the actions undertaken by ARF, AMAN and their partners to support the most vulnerable groups.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a densely populated country with large number of poor and unemployed people. Rural poverty is very high in Northern districts of Bangladesh and most of the people live in rural areas, depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Every year, major parts of the country are affected by cyclones, drought, river erosion and flooding which bring severe consequences on people lives and livelihood. As a result, rural people remain poor.

Because of the extensive lock down imposed by the Bangladeshi government, thousands of people lost their income, particularly daily wage earners, maid servants and floating people who live on the footpath and temporary shelter, as well as marginalized farming families and garment workers. As the month of Ramadan is considered holy by the Muslim majority population, the loss of an income is felt even more distressing.

ARF/AMAN Action

ARF and AMAN, in partnership with Muslimehelfen from Germany and LIFE from France, has reached 11,100 families with no income, distributing food packs aimed at easing the economic burden of food. The villages and cities where the distributions took place are Joypurhat, Bogura, Naogaon, Sirajgonj, Dinajpur, Sherpur, Barisal, Pirojpur and Dhaka. Despite the difficulties encountered by ARF/AMAN staff and volunteers in distributing the food due to the lock down and the restriction of movements, with the help of the authorities they successfully managed to reach all the determined families, spreading the benefit to a total of 44,000 people.

The food packs contained 10 kg of rice, 1 kg of lentils, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of salt, 1 liter of cooking oil and 1 packet of semai.

The Lorraine Robinson and Maeve Coughlan Education Fund (LOMEF) also contributed, through the Nomijan-Aftabi Foundation (NAF), to alleviating the food crisis aggravated by the Covid-19 emergency, by distributing 5,000 \$ worth of food packs to disadvantaged people in Joipurhat district, Bangladesh.

Cox's Bazar Refugee Camp

There are currently over 1 million Rohingya refugees living in 32 camps of Cox's Bazar who fled genocide in Rakhine state of Myanmar. All refugee camps are overcrowded, needs are immediate and enormous, and resources are stretched. Moreover, in the beginning of May, a fire destroyed 673 shelters. Incidents like those are frequent in the overcrowded camps.

The Rohingya refugees need everything – food, shelter, clothes, healthcare, clean water, education and others. Aid and charity organizations are trying hard to address the basic needs of refugees. Food is one of the immediate needs of refugees.

The refugee camp host community is also fighting poverty and lack of employment opportunities.

ARF/AMAN Action

Despite having received the funds necessary for the distribution of food packs for families residing inside Cox's Bazar refugee camp, the actual distribution was put on hold due to the denial of authorization by the government to access the refugee camp. The distribution took place as soon as the authority gave the authorization and the entrance of the refugee camp was deemed secure.

ARF/AMAN team also succeeded in distributing food packs to poor families in the host community of Cox's Bazar. The food packs here distributed, with the partnership of Muslimehelfen, contained 10 kg of rice, 2 kg of lentils, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of salt, 2 liter of cooking oil, 500 g pack of chili powder, 500 g pack of turmeric powder and 500 g pack of coriander powder.

LIFE food packages, which sustained 5,000 families in the host communities of Cox's Bazar, Dhaka city and Naogaon district, contained 15 kg of rice, 2 liter of cooking oil, 2 kg of lentils, 2 kg of chickpeas, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of salt, 200 g pack of chili powder, 200 g pack of turmeric powder and 200 gram pack of coriander powder. Despite being also ready to support Rohingya families in the refugee camp, due to the lock down restrictions, regrettably this was not possible.

NEPAL

Nepal has experienced a slight economic growth in the past few years, however, about 31.2 per cent of the population that are estimated to live between \$1.9 and \$3.2 a day face significant risks of falling into extreme poverty, primarily because of reduced remittances, foregone earnings of potential migrants, job losses in the informal sector, and rising prices for essential commodities as a result of Covid-19. Islam is a minority religion in Nepal. According to the 2011 Nepal census, Nepal has 1 million Muslims comprising 4.4 per cent of the population of Nepal. 38 per cent of Nepali Muslims live in poverty.

Several hundred Rohingya have sought refuge in Nepal. Yet, though they have escaped the fighting in Rakhine, life in Nepal is not without its problems for those who are often called the most repressed people in the world. There are approximately 300 Rohingya living in hastily constructed shelters in Kathmandu, many of whom live in Kapan, while other reports state that some 600 are spread out over Nepal. However, due to their precarious situation, a rigorous report about their numbers and whereabouts is difficult to get.

ARF/AMAN Action

During the month of Ramadan ARF and AMAN team, with the collaboration of MuslimeHelfen from Germany, distributed food packs to 1,180 poor families. Thanks to this contribution more than 5,000 Nepali Muslim and Rohingya refugees from Chandragiri, Dahachok, Swayambhu and Kapan benefited from food relief.

Each food pack contains 15 kg of rice, 2 kg of wheat flour, 2 kg of lentils, 2 liter of cooking oil, 1 kg of salt, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of sewai.

AZAD KASHMIR

Since 1947, Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two, one part controlled by India and another part, known as Azad Kashmir which means independent Kashmir, is under Pakistan control. Azad Kashmir has a population of 4 million, with the majority living in rural areas. Due to severe damage caused by an earthquake in the mid-2000s and in 2015, recurrent flooding and a constant tension, the economic development of the region is deeply compromised and its population has fallen into deep poverty.

It is difficult to obtain the exact numbers of Covid affected people in Azad Kashmir, as the official data are given for the whole area of Pakistan. But unofficial data are given every day and at least 70 confirmed cases are reported in Azad Kashmir.

The already difficult situation that Azad Kashmir population live all year long has been exacerbated by the ulterior restriction that the Pakistani government has imposed in order to fight the spread of the virus, and has put the population in a desperate fight against starvation.

ARF/AMAN Action

ARF and AMAN, in partnership with Azad Kashmir Resource Forum (AKRF), distributed food packs to 100 families most affected in Azad Kashmir, benefiting a total of 500 hundred people.

Each food pack contained 10 kg rice/wheat flour, 1 liter of edible oil, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of lentil, 1 kg of salt.

ARF and AMAN teams are actively seeking more funds in order to reach more families in need.

INDIA

Two-thirds of people in India live in poverty: 68.8 per cent of the Indian population lives on less than \$2 a day. This makes the Indian subcontinent one of the poorest countries in the world; women and children, the weakest members of Indian society, suffer the most.

India is the second most populous country after China with about 1.2 billion people. The country has enjoyed a very high growth rate over many years and is one of the largest economies in the world. However, only a small percentage of the Indian population has benefited from this impressive economic boom so far, as the majority of people are still living in degraded poverty.

India is one of the world's top countries when it comes to malnutrition: more than 200 million people don't have sufficient access to food, including 61 million children.

India's Muslim community has for long faced discrimination and relatively lower living standards. The Muslim community has the lowest rate of enrollment in higher education in India, accounting for just 4.4 per cent of students. It also faces high levels of poverty, with 25 per cent of India's 370,000 beggars being Muslim.

With the recent enforcement of a strict lock down beggars and daily wage earners have lost their already meager income and the risk of starvation has become very real.

ARF/AMAN Action

ARF and AMAN team, with the collaboration of MuslimeHelfen from Germany, in the months of April and May has reached out to 4,050 families with no income and a total of 8,000 people. The distributions took place in Assam (Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Goalpara villages), Bihar (Darbhanga and Madhubani villages) and in West Bengal (North 24 Parganas and Kolkata city).

Each food pack contains 10 kg of rice, 2 kg of lentils, 2 liter of mustard oil, 1 kg of salt, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of sewai.

THAILAND

In recent years, many people have fled to Thailand in order to escape persecution and violence in Pakistan, Myanmar and Syria. They constantly live in fear with the risk of arrest and lack of food and water supplies. Despite having the status of asylum seekers or refugees, since Thailand has not ratified the 1951 refugee convention and does not recognize the status of refugees, they are considered as illegal immigrants and they constantly live in concern and sustain themselves with odd jobs. It is estimated that over 5,000 urban refugees are living in Bangkok.

Muslims comprise Thailand's largest religious minority and are concentrated mainly in the southern provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. Southern Thailand is also a conflict affected area and the economic condition of the people is greatly affected by it.

A big Muslim community also lives in Nong Chok area, a district of Bangkok. The socio-economic conditions of a lot of them is poor and some of live below the poverty line.

ARF/AMAN Action

- The Ramadan food distribution program targeted 1,900 poor and low income Muslim families, refugees and asylum seekers providing them with essential food items during the month of Ramadan. Each food packs contains 5 kg of rice, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of salt, 2 liter of cooking oil, 1 bottle of fish sauce and 6 units of milk. With the collaboration of MuslimeHelfen from Germany and Helping Hands from the US, ARF and AMAN staff and volunteers distributed the food packs in villages in six Thai provinces (Narathiwat, Pattani, Yala, Tak, Satun and Songkhla) and in Nong Chok and ARF Bangkok's office;
- Each week ARF and AMAN distribute food packs for refugees and asylum seekers. Each month from 110 to 120 refugees come to ARF's Bangkok office, however, due to the Covid-19 crisis and the loss of thousands of jobs, April saw a surge of the numbers of needy refugees. A total of 154 food packs were distributed to refugees from Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Jordan, Pakistan, Palestine and Vietnam. Thanks to Muslimehelfen, which is financing the program for six month, the distribution can meet the immediate need for the next months;
- Due to the Covid-19 crisis and the movement restrictions that followed, many Nong Chok residents have lost their income and are now battling poverty. With the collaboration of Helping Hand from the US, ARF staff and volunteers distributed 100 food and hygiene packs to the poorest people. Each food pack contained 10 kg of rice, 1 pack of instant noodles, 1kg of sugar, 1 pack of milk, 1 kg of salt, 1 pack of canned fish, 2 disinfectant spray and 2 washable face masks.

LOMEF: a special contribution to education

ARF administers the Lorraine Robinson and Maeve Coughlan Education Fund (LOMEF) since 1998. LOMEF supports the education of the poorest communities by providing essential school items and scholarships to graduated and under-graduated children, by financing part of the teacher's salaries and by giving funds for the construction of community schools and facilities. Over the years, LOMEF has secured the access to education for 25,967 children in countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Argentina, Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. To address the needs of vulnerable rural communities, in response to major natural disasters and humanitarian crisis, LOMEF also provides emergency assistance to the victims.

This year, in order to support children with special needs, LOMEF, ARF and the Nomijan-Aftabi Foundation (NAF) provided uniforms to children and teachers of Bogura Deaf-and-Dumb School, located in the colony of Bogura town, in Bangladesh.

CLOSING REMARKS

The entire world is on the verge of an unprecedented crisis. The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that the world will face "mega-famines" if enough is not done to combat the ripple effects of the Corona virus pandemic, which is continuing to cost many lives, on the world's most fragile countries, which are already grappling with food insecurity.

ARF and AMAN have been working in the area of humanitarian assistance since the year 2000. With the help of dozens of volunteers, staff and partners, all committed to offer relief to the most disadvantaged people, we reached our hands to thousands of families.

In the exceptional situation that Covid-19 pandemic has created, the problems encountered due to the social distancing requirements, to the restriction of movements and to the limitations on public gatherings were extensive. However, despite those implementation limitations, with the help of local authorities in some cases and through the adoption of adapted approaches in distributing in some particular places, like delivering food packages at the doorsteps of the beneficiaries, all the distributions could be completed successfully.

ARF and AMAN are well aware that those actions are not near sufficient to eradicate starvation, nevertheless, as active part of the society, we will continue to try our best, and more, to reach disadvantaged people.